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SOLILOQUY ON THE AIRPLANE

by Henry Beston

For some time there has been forming in the world as we know it a new force of protest whose strength is not realized in America. What is left of the humane and civilized mind is experiencing a revulsion against the barbarities of aerial warfare. At the present moment, as photographs from Korea arrive with the latest pictures of such warfare, many showing flimsy villages dissolving under a giant violence of bombs, there is appearing in the world press a tone which shows a real alienation in temper from America. Such an alienation in temper and attitude can divide nations far more subtly and forcibly than a difference in political institutions.

There has always been uneasiness about the modern technique of bombing even in mechanically-minded America, and this uneasiness has now moved from a few pamphlets and courageous letters out into the world which reflects popular expression. It is not without significance that the Russian propaganda services have been quick to seize upon this revulsion from violence which is astir, and are calling attention everywhere, and by every means of communication, to what they are describing as American savagery in the air. An influential British weekly, moreover, reprinted from the English language press of the British community in China (a source which could easily be checked and needs checking) a most horrifying account of aerial barbarism as supposedly told by a GI. This essay does not discuss the authenticity of such a narrative. The point that one wishes to make is that such an account is going the rounds, and meeting the eye of the civilized reader.

What is speaking out in the present mood of criticism is the human conscience, and one must believe in the existence of such an attribute of the human spirit if one is to have any hope of bettering the human situation. It is conscience which makes man a human being, and shapes human life into a thing aware of moral responsibility and able to recognize an act of guilt. It is not primarily the civilized instincts which have awakened or even the outraged intelligence which asks why a country should be returned to its native possessors ravaged and burnt, its capital in flames, at the close of an effort to restore "the good life". It is something older and more fundamental which has found a

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voice, an attitude of the human spirit coupled, one would say after reading the press, with a sense of disgust.

Of first importance in this new stirring of the moral air is the question of what the revulsion against such techniques will mean to American insistence on the world leadership of humanity through moral superiority.

II

In the totality of human experience the invention of the airplane is perhaps the greatest single act of violence done to the natural order of the world. Man is an alien in the sky. It is to the sky that he looks for his blessings, for the sun and the rain which awaken and sustain the life of all things. Only such an incident as a dangerous thunderstorm interrupts, and for a moment of time only, the beneficent relation. If he be Christian, it is to the sky that the poet in his soul looks for his heaven. Not without something of a wound to the psyche has man been able to envisage and endure a hideous rain of burning iron, towers of fire, and inextinguishable gobbets of flame from the serenity overhead, and death rather than life falling on his fields.

Few philosophical thinkers appear to have grasped what is perhaps the first thing which should have been noticed about the plane as a new invention -- that it was sure to give Man too much power over men. It was clearly an invention which was capable of, indeed destined to, hideous misuse; an invention with which men were no more to be trusted than an uncertain and betimes malicious child was to be trusted with a box of high explosive.

Granted certain possibilities of usefulness, it would have to be kept within the world of the human conscience if there were not to be disaster. Man might survive gunpowder and the invention of artillery, but who could say that he might survive fire from heaven any more than the Cities of the Plain?

These inherent powers of gigantic violence the military were swift to perceive, and presently the catastrophe was upon us. How was it that the machine escaped so easily from the normal bounds of civilized morality? What made possible the coming adventure into barbarism? To begin with, the Christian West, still enfeebled by the impact of the Nineteenth Century, was in no mood or even in the proper health to give battle to much of anything, and, secondly, such reservoirs of spiritual decency as the old formal and humanist education had once filled had been emptied by the change in the ideals and the content of education and by the situation noted in Yeats' line "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold".

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Of particular importance was the change in the attitude to human beings. Until the late Nineteenth and the Twentieth Century, human beings were still creatures illumined by a fading aura of religion, they were both fellow creatures and citizens of some poetic and immortal scheme. After the change, they were but fellow animals of no particular importance, except perhaps as voters. It had become a time in which anything could be done to men, women and children for they no longer had a meaning; a terrible development especially in an age marked by the loss of the power to feel.

At the same hour there was entering into history the instrument of warfare which broke any possible relation of humanity between man as the attacker and man the attacked. One dropped something from the sky and that was all. If one saw things running, they were nothingnesses and too far away to be felt as human.

III

Thus emancipated at once from the human conscience, common sense, and any concept whatever of the structure of human society, the airplane took over the future of civilization. The noble cities of Europe, belonging to no regime but to the inheritance of the West, became seas of flame as the great incendiaries, bursting, flowered into gigantic, oil-well columns of fire; the smoke of burning London and the ashes of burning Berlin filling what was left of the civilized mind with horror. Museums, hospitals, the varied apparatus of learning and civilization -- nothing was spared by the air-mind.

Let those who remember the indignation which in War I followed the artillery damage to Rheims Cathedral pause to consider what has happened to the spirit of man! It might be well if we all took a little thought of the hideous air jargon which is quoted in the press -- "We started a perfect peach of a big fire." "Guess nobody'll live there for a long time, we got the last house." It is the talk of a culture which has lost its natural humanity.

IV

The next development in the history of aerial warfare was entirely logical and to be expected. It was the atomic bomb, a second act of violence to nature which has made the whole of the modern world sick with a new timorousness. There are two particular points to be noted about this weapon, first the disembodied abstractness which is a break with the norm of the physical as it is known by man, and secondly its utter contempt for the human beings who vanish in the incandescence of

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solar flame. Surely only those who have ceased to be human beings could have ever used this diabolism against other human beings!

The author of the present essay confesses to a rising of the gorge when college officials connected with this unspeakable atrocity venture to address the college young on questions of morality. Such scholars could not have failed to know, being experts in their field, that what they were releasing on the living and the unborn was not a military weapon in any sense but a weapon of indiscriminate mass-murder proper for the mass age.

It is to be hoped that some humane and courageous scholar will presently give us the completely honest history of this perverse diabolism, of the lies surrounding its birth, and of the off-the-human circumstances which, one hears, accompanied its first two experimental massacres. The European press has recently carried a story -- given here for what it is worth -- to the effect that the young man whose duty it was to open the bomb ports and release the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima has retired to a monastery seeking some return of the inner peace. Quite a number of scientists and educators might well follow his path with ashes on their heads, preferably imported from Japan.

How can aerial warfare be again contained within the civilized conscience? The military mind in the nation has apparently not the slightest notion of the need of such a development. The press speaks casually of the national stockpile of the atomic bomb, and there is little public discussion of any proposal from any source to outlaw the weapon. Moreover, again to quote the press, our laboratories are ready with their studied cultures of disease, their gruesome epidemics, their vegetation killers and crop and animal destroyers for the planes to distribute over the earth surface belonging to the enemy.

There is a strong strain of hypocrisy in the English-language mind. If this nation is actually to lead the world, it must rid itself of this hypocrisy as of some contaminating slime. Other nations will not take us seriously; indeed, they are secretly afraid of us, and hostile. Some rebirth of honesty must be hoped for, prayed for. In the present uncertainty the lie is a way of death. The airplane in war must be recognized by what is left of the human intelligence as the supreme human danger. If honesty and humanity do not somehow return to our culture, the drama is over, and the Devil himself will ring the curtain down.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events Vol. VII, No. 42

By Frank C. Hanighen October 18, 1950

THE WAKE ISLAND MYSTERY: Newspapers by now seem to have exhausted speculation about the MacArthur-Truman meeting. The befuddlement was bad enough before Truman delivered his oration in San Francisco. But his failure to give even a clue as to what decisions were reached at Wake has increased frustration. Many observers simply dismiss the whole business as a crass political stunt; but others, who are tempted to share this view, prefer to look more deeply into the whole matter.

These observers concentrate on the talk in the Quonset hut between the President and the General. It is common belief that if an agreement on policy was reached at all it must have been in that two-man conference. What did they say? No one knows. But the cordiality which the twain showed each other during and after the talk, and the statement about "unanimity" of views has strengthened the belief that agreement was achieved.

That is what worries the thoughtful in Washington. They suspect there may have been something which the President regards as an agreement, but which MacArthur doesn't; or vice versa. They argue as follows: a number of figures in the Government who know the President well have had, at one time or another, the experience of explaining carefully and lucidly some problem to him and of receiving the impression that he understood perfectly; yet five minutes later or five days later, it appeared that the President had failed completely to comprehend. After all, whatever qualities have been attributed to Mr. Truman, quick intelligence is not one of them.

There is also, it is pointed out by old Washington observers, an attitude of Mr. Truman which is like that of the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt and, especially, former Secretary of State Stettinius. It is a pathetic trust that if two international figures could only sit down together and converse amiably about trifles, great and knotty problems of foreign policy would easily dissolve.

All this may sound harmless, but really it isn't. What is feared is that General MacArthur left to return to Tokyo with assurance that he could go ahead on one set of assumptions, and the President turned back eastward with no assumption save that he "got along fine" with the General. If that was so, the seed of much future trouble may have been planted at the Wake Island meeting.

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NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND UN: Edna Lonigan comments -- Last week we mentioned how signs pointed to a plan of the State Department-UN clique to let Syngman Rhee fall without their seeming to push him because he was too anti-Communist. Evidently the Koreans saw the same possibility. On October 15, the Republic of Korea rejected as "unacceptable" the UN Interim Committee Resolution restricting the authority of the Republic's Government to below the 38th Parallel, and taking out of its hands the business of completing elections in upper Korea.

"The Government of Korea finds these proposals unacceptable as being wrong in principle and untenable in practice, since they disregard the sovereign status and right of the Government of the Republic of Korea", the Korean statement said. It then listed the official pronouncements of UN recognizing its government and the elections under which it operated. This dignified statement was the more impressive because it was accompanied by an eloquent tribute to what the Republic owed the UN.

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The issue is national sovereignty or UN. If the UN can intervene within the body of a nation, split it into parts, and decide how the parts may function, then sovereignty has been transferred to UN. The "Nation-State" has become a province. "It is the firm belief of this Government that it is not the intention of the United National General Assembly to act as a super-government", disregarding the sovereignty of the Republic, the Korean Government said.

The strategy by which a nation is broken into fragments politically, and the fragments rearranged to eliminate the anti-Communist group, has long been practiced by Soviet Russia. We followed her example in the case of Free China. We have tried to do the same thing in Spain, and we are not wholly guiltless in our insistence on changes in government and policy in Turkey and in Greece and the Dutch East Indies, to fit New Deal-collectivist policies. Now Senator Humphrey of Minnesota, long a supporter of the PAC-ADA combine which keeps the State Department-UN group in power, frankly proposes that we find new leaders of our own choosing for Indo-China.

UN is however a much better cyclotron for splitting into fragments the governments which are not amenable to orders. The smaller nations of Europe, Asia and South America, should quickly see the danger to them in this internal intervention by UN. But what of the U.S? If UN can make specious excuses for breaching the walls of a small, foreign Nation-State to help the strategy of the collectivists, what is to prevent it from gradually breaching the walls of the American nation, and rearranging the political fragments to suit its purpose?

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SOCIAL SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS: The performances of the Federal Security Agency never fail to leave us in a state of dazed bewilderment. As we have observed before, our social security laws are in no way based upon mathematics, common sense or self-respecting humane feeling. They are distinctly political and consist of an elaborate series of formulas which the uplifters appropriated, mostly from the old German system, and managed to get through Congress during the sturm und drang of the depression. The bosses of the system are neither mathematicians nor have they training as actuaries. They are, without exception, "social minded" persons with an itch for power. The Social Security publicity machine works night and day telling the public with what full hearts the administrators approach their tasks, but the truth is that the system is a chaotic mess, the discrimination against women in the distribution of old age benefits is outrageous and, of course, there are millions of old people outside the law who will never receive any benefits at all.

Latest developments concern Wilbur Cohen, who is assistant, technical valet and general leg man for Social Security Commissioner Altmeyer. Cohen, whose mannerisms suggest a Weimar Republic job holder, is an extremely ambitious man and hopes some day to be top functionary in the system. For a time Cohen had a subordinate named Dorothy Lally, an earnest lady who was required, as one task, to act as hostess to visiting Latin-American "students" of our social security system. Time passed and the government pressed more vigorously in the direction of Point Four. Miss Lally was dispatched to Egypt and Iran to advise on the installation of social security systems in those countries. One may speculate on just exactly how these countries expect to set up contributory social service systems among the fellahin of the Nile Valley and the tribesmen of northern Persia.

No matter. Miss Lally's departure left her Latin-American hostess-ship vacant. The duties were taken over by an amiable youth named Beryl Frank, who is reported to have "taken social science courses at Harvard". Now Mr. Frank ceases to be host to Latin Americans. Wilbur Cohen has spoken. Young Frank is about to depart for Salvador; there, like Miss Lally in Egypt and Iran, to advise on just how social security systems should be run. Once upon a time this sort of thing would have been called by its right name -- playing house. Such obvious truths are not said aloud any more. In one way or another, we may be sure, some of this nonsense is

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being paid for by the American taxpayer. The rest comes out of the country where the system is set up and, no doubt, they finance it, through one channel or another, out of the United States Treasury also.

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SOCIAL SECURITY FOR FARMERS: Readers will recall the space we devoted last spring to the expanded social security bill (H.R. 6000) which finally became law last August. Under this bill large numbers of agricultural workers were taken into the system. Of course one immediate question was: How will the social security tax be levied and what are the chances for collection? The SSA people were not worried about this; they had their ever-ready formula; it could be "adapted". Experience would show best what next to do.

It is now clear that both farmer and hired man will be bogged in some appalling bookkeeping. Word comes from political workers here and there that farm people are already sore. The full operation of agricultural social security doesn't really get under way before January 1, and we doubt the exasperation will have much effect on the election. But by 1952, if the same system is in force, we confidently predict that the Democrats will lose large slices of the farm vote. An excellent picture of the mazes of the system may be seen in the October issue of The Agricultural Situation, an Agricultural Department periodical, which contains a piece by Altmeyer on the new law.

Says he: "As an illustration take the case of Bill Smith who has been working for Albert Jones as a dairy hand. Bill has worked for Jones all of the fourth quarter of 1950; therefore he can be covered for social security beginning January 1, 1951. During January, February and March of 1951, Bill works continuously for Mr. Jones and earns $200 in cash wages. These wages will count for social security. In May, 1951, Bill takes another job with Mr. Roy Alman. Thus during the April-June quarter of 1951 Bill works 24 days for Mr. Jones and earns $65 in cash. He works 48 days for Mr. Alman and earns cash wages of $150. Bill's work for Mr. Jones counts for social security but not his work for Mr. Alman, because he has not yet worked a 'qualifying quarter' for him." Etc., etc., etc. If the reader wants to sweat through the social security manuals he can work out the problem quoted above and the rest of the law as well.

But it will take hours of midnight oil, and the complications are so great, the exceptions so numerous and the meshes in the law so wide, that even then neither farmer nor hired man can be sure. What then? Says Altmeyer: they "should get instructions from their local Collectors of Internal Revenue". This is the obvious finish. Since, under the present system it is impossible to devise a clear and simple law, the only recourse of the Social Security people at the last is to call out the catch polls and sic the dogs on the taxpayer. Time was when only the rich wrestled with the Internal Revenue Bureau. Then came the turn of the professionals and the white collars. Now, at last, the hired man and the urban domestic are to get theirs.

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MRS. ROOSEVELT AGAIN: Mrs. Roosevelt ere long will become the Mother Bloor of the Fair Dealers. A few days ago she celebrated her birthday by opening a new radio program, conducted in collaboration with her warrior son, Brigadier General Elliott Roosevelt. Five days a week, Monday through Friday, from 12:30 to 1:15 (EST) the duo may be heard over WNBC. The program must be heard to be appreciated. After a round of commercials in which Elliott calls his mother's attention to how perfectly delicious Flamingo Orange Juice is and reminds her that the new home-done permanent made with Bobbi (pat.) puts the work of a professional hairdresser to shame, he then gets to the meat of the program. One of his main questions on October 16 was: "Mother, tell us the fundamental difference between the Republicans and Democrats." No need to tell what the answer was nor add that the answer was copious.

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Book Events

International Relations in the Age of the Conflict Between Democracy and Dictatorship, by Robert Strausz-Hupé and Stefan T. Possony. New York: McGraw Hill Company. $6.00. Reviewed by W. H. Chamberlin.

The long title of this book suggests its massive character. The almost unlimited subject of international relations is examined in almost one thousand pages of text, buttressed with vast erudition and illuminated by many flashes of perceptive wisdom. The authors are scholars connected respectively with the University of Pennsylvania and Georgetown University.

The range of the book is literally staggering. The single letter V in the index includes references to Varro, Vegetius, the Treaty of Verdun (842 A.D.), the Verona Conference (1822) and Andrei Vishinsky. Among the subjects discussed in this encyclopedic volume are the functions of diplomats, population and power, techniques in the cold war, economics as a weapon, the Second World War, atomic politics and Atlantic Union.

Much of the book is of a reference character and some very interesting documents, old and new, are reproduced, including the German-Soviet Treaty of Rapallo, the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August, 1939, the North Atlantic Pact, the Brussels Alliance of 1948, and a memorandum submitted by the younger Pitt to the Russian Government in 1805. A feature of this memorandum was its moderation, a quality that favorably distinguished the peace settlement after the Napoleonic Wars both from the Treaty of Versailles and from what has passed for peace since 1945.

However, the book is far from being a colorless collection of undisputed facts. It should be, but probably will not be, required reading for all utopians. For much learning has made the authors profoundly skeptical about the value of one-idea panaceas. And they are ruthless with attempts to make platitudes a substitute for policy. Their merciless dissection of some of the long moralistic musings of Cordell Hull recalls the characterization of Hull as "the hillbilly Polonius" by a witty and mischievous Washington hostess.

Strausz-Hupé and Possony look back with more than a trace of regret to the "bad old times" when wars were fought without hysteria, when statesmen looked after their national interests without making any pretense of being crusaders for international righteousness, when, as they say, "wars were limited liability enterprises, not supposedly holy crusades". They recall that "no Morgenthau arose in 1815 with a scheme to turn France into an economic desert".

They answer the question whether Soviet Communism and Western civilization can co-exist peacefully with another and not too hopeful question: "When did a powerful militant ideology ever become peaceful and static before it had been stopped by superior force?" At the same time they reject the idea of a "preventive" atomic war, to be initiated by the United States on the ground that this proposal "is based upon a flagrant overestimation of the effectiveness of the atomic bomb and the overall military potential of the United States".

What they favor is the maintenance of full military strength by the free nations, along with a plan for Atlantic Union in which Germany would be admitted to full partnership. Western European Union without Germany, as they say, is manifestly an absurdity and they offer their readers this piece of timely realistic advice: "The security and well-being of Western Europe must be planned against the primary threat which comes from Moscow and not from Berlin, let alone Bonn. The future cannot be built by perpetuating the tensions of the past. There must be an end to every conflict. The time is ripe for the liquidation of the hereditary Franco-German enmity."

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European Supplement to Human Events Vol. VII, No. 42

By Bertrand de Jouvenel PARIS -- October, 1950

THE WESTERN LEAGUE: An international body politic is actually taking life under our eyes, which remain blind to it, turned away from reality to fictions. The reality is the Western League: a conglomeration of nations between which armed conflict is inconceivable, among which reign much the same mores and ways of feeling, and between which the sense of likeness and solidarity grows apace under the menace of this strange and deeply foreign thing threatening from the East.

The fictions are the United Nations and Europe. There is greatness in the idea that the governments of the world should club together under the aegis of moral beliefs held in common and should keep each other going in the paths of righteousness. Nor is it an idea incapable of realization. But its basic condition has to be fulfilled; that is, there must be moral beliefs held in common. Failing this, the UN is just a place where enemies may talk together. It is quite incorrect to talk of the UN's having taken a great step forward this summer, as having acted and won in Korea. What has really happened is quite different: The United States has acted in Korea and its action has heartened fellow-members of the Western League which have supported this action (after the event), in the sittings of the UN. What has given the feeling of the UN's coming alive is in fact the coming alive of the Western League. This is not to deny that the UN can be useful: but a meeting place is not to be mistaken for a living force.

European Union also is a fiction. It was a very natural idea that the stump of Europe still remaining -- comprising the greatest nations of the last centuries -- should become one body politic, to face the moral and material menace from the East. But Britain has refused to take the lead in this: and the French governments, while willing European Union, have not willed its basic condition -- complete acceptance of Western Germany.

The reality is the Western League. It has arisen out of the pressure of circumstances. In their economic difficulties after the war, the European nations turned to the U.S. for help, and they turned again for protection when they understood the menace from the East. In both cases the U.S. met them more than halfway. American opinion was made to feel responsible for Europe. European opinion has come to count upon American support of every kind. Indeed, at the moment of writing, there is speculation in Paris as to how much M. Moch and M. Petsche will "bring back" from the U.S. in the way of American divisions for our defense and of American millions for our Treasury.

It is easy, as an American, to grow indignant that European governments have learned to rely on the American taxpayer and the American soldier, and to stress that their need is due in great part to their lack of judgment or courage, which binds them to unreasonable policies in their national and intra-European affairs. True enough. But this line of thought should logically lead to dropping Europe as Chiang Kai-shek was dropped, or to forcing upon European nations other forms of government, neither of which courses can be contemplated. As a European, it is easy to denounce increasing dependence upon American decisions, and to compare the present trend with that which brought Athens' allies into a position of vassalage. However, those most worried about such a trend are, by a strange inconsistency, usually the last to advocate the political courses which would make financial equilibrium and military defense possible by purely European means.

One may take a more optimistic view of what is going on and stress that in every body politic the richer parts subsidize the poorer, and the central parts attend to the defense of the outlying parts. Indeed one might push the simile and

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say that the richer parts pay for the public works and the public services in the poorer parts, which is exactly what the U.S. has done by Marshall Aid, thus pouring back money into the least productive areas from which it seeps to the more productive. We might then say that the relationship established between the U.S. and the European States is an abnormal one, causing undue American sacrifices, and leading the European nations into vassalage, only insofar as it is not regarded and understood as part of the process of integration of an Atlantic community.

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PROBLEMS OF THE WESTERN LEAGUE: The Atlantic Union is not a better idea than European Union. Indeed it may be argued that the latter body, based upon the four columns of Britain, France, Germany and Italy, would offer a more balanced structure than the Atlantic Union unbalanced by the formidable superiority of the U.S. over its partners. The merit of the Atlantic Union as against European Union is that the former is happening. History offers but few examples of an organized whole arising from a concourse of equally active wills in the previously autonomous parts: the building up of the American union of states stands almost unique. There is unfortunately no sign that the phenomenon is to be repeated. A far more frequent process of association is by the initiative and persistent will of a major partner. History however teaches that this manner of building poses all the problems attending upon inequality of contribution and of power.

A major Power which leads a congeries of much smaller ones finds itself in a very delicate position. As it assumes responsibility, it cannot fail to assume some authority. It arouses the susceptibilities of nationalism. In the meantime, however, as the Allies look back upon a complete sovereignty they inevitably forfeit, they look forward individually to complete citizenship rights in the leading State. And this leading Power is arraigned at the same time for excessive inroads upon the independence of the allied States and insufficient assimilation of the allied citizens to its own. Such complaints were brought against Athens and Rome in their day. They are inherent in the relationship.

What I want to make here is a plea for more attentiveness to this relationship. Much thought is being given to the relation between the West and the opposing world. It is stressed on the other hand that there is a social battle to be won in the several countries of the West. But between the foreign policy of the West as a whole and the internal problem of individual Western countries, come the relations between the component parts of the West, which constitute immediately quite a problem; and which may indeed be a problem of greater permanence than the situation which gives rise to it. We should clearly conceive that ERP and the Atlantic alliance have been mere steps in the building of the Western League which itself is very probably a great commonwealth in the making. And we should begin to think out this relationship.

As soon as we speak of a commonwealth in the making, we of course think of the formidable intellectual achievement between 1776 and 1787. We may well feel envious of the apparent ease with which the leaders boldly drew patterns for the relations within the new commonwealth. Perhaps it came so naturally to them because "they saw politics as the expression of great theoretical truths".

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APPRECIATION OF THE POUND: As a consequence of last year's devaluation the official value of the pound in French francs is 980. This par value has never been quoted in the unofficial markets of Paris where the pound note has fetched at times as little as 890 francs. On the 9th of October for the first time the unofficial market has given for the pound the par price of 980. It is quite an event, which

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manifests a new faith in the British currency. This is due in part to the news given on the 3rd of October by Mr. Gaitskell, of a fourth consecutive increase in the gold and dollar reserves at London; in part to the rumors of pound revaluation, discounted in serious circles. But above all it is due to the increasing realization that with raw materials in great demand and with the sterling area the greatest dispenser of raw materials after the Western hemisphere, the pound is bound to be in great demand.

What has especially struck French imagination is the attitude of uncompromising opposition to international control and allocation of raw materials, taken by British representatives in the European Organization for Economic Co-operation. To the French proposal of such control, the British answer was undiplomatically clear: Nothing of the kind was to be thought of. It seems only yesterday that the British were being chary of the European Union of Payments, fearing that their partners would collect sterling balances which they would not want to hold, for which they would demand payment in gold and dollars. First-class economists feared that Britain had made a frightful bloomer by finally coming into the Union. All is changed now and the sterling is fast becoming a scarce currency on the Continent. There is speculation in well informed circles of the Continent, not on revaluation of sterling but on its convertibility. (It is regarded as quite absurd that England should at the same time go on receiving dollars, maintain import discriminations against American goods, and revalue the pound against the dollar.) It is felt that convertibility of the pound into dollars would complete the building up of the English-speaking union, the essential part of the Western League. Realists however point to the enormity of floating sterling balances, the existence of which would stultify the project, and skeptics deny that the British Socialist Government would, even if it easily could, divest itself of a most powerful means of economic control.

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POLITICAL CRUMBLING IN FRANCE: My friend Professor Michael Polanyi remarked the other day that the French Third Force had not done so badly after all since only two years ago there was continual anxiety about the possibility of a breakdown similar to that of the Weimar Republic while in fact things had very much improved. Raymond Aron countered this assertion by remarking that the Weimar people had been foolish, holding three elections in two years, which gave their opponents three chances of demonstrating their strength; but the Third Force people, Aron went on, had carefully abstained from consulting the people and were even now in search of a mode of election which would allow them to obtain once more a majority in the House even though they have irretrievably lost it in the country.

These two excellent minds then fell to discussing the seeming paradox of a striking recovery in the country accompanied by a lack of political consolidation. There is no confidence in the political leaders who show no assurance or courage on their part.

The present French Government is possibly not inferior to its predecessors from which it does not differ essentially, being the nth reconstruction of the same team with the same players shifted around. But it is unfortunate in having to cope with problems which had been successively adjourned by previous incumbents.

Sooner or later France had to face the necessity of rearming, the necessity of welcoming Western Germany as an equal associate, the necessity of making up her mind on Indo-China, the necessity of knocking some semblance of order into the results of the 1944 revolution, and the necessity of dealing with the Communist problem.

On Germany the Government has sought postponement. M. Moch's strong feelings on the subject seem to have played a decisive part in the adoption of a stubborn negative. Popular distaste has been invoked as the main motive but in fact there are many signs that public opinion is more favorable than the Government has repre-

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sented it. The evening daily Paris-Presse has found 55 per cent of its readers for German rearmament and 23 per cent against. The public opinion invoked by the Government is less that of the common man than of special groups. The Ministers congratulate themselves on having at least gained time. Let us pray that we may not have to reproach them with the time in fact lost.

Indo-China now is pressing. There is hardly any informed person who did not hear last spring that October would be a fateful month in Indo-China: nothing seems to have been done in the meantime, either to extricate the 150 thousand Frenchmen ventured out there or to reinforce them. Indeed only a fortnight ago the Government issued a communiqué stating that it was not proposed to send reinforcements, that news to that effect was false: it was explained that this denial was meant to reassure public opinion. This is characteristic of the Government attitude: it will, they believe, reassure public opinion, to hear that nothing shall be done. Then disaster is born of inaction out of cowardice.

Indignation has flared up on the 10th of October on the news of disaster experienced in the retreat from Caobang, news which had been delayed five days in legitimate fear of public anger. This is the outcome of an indecisive policy which has absorbed to no purpose the best part of France's officers and NCOs and which drains away far more money every year than the French pay in income taxes. No effort has been made at any time to win decisively nor has any such honorable "slipping away" been attempted as the British accomplished in India.

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GOVERNMENT BY ADMINISTRATION LOBBIES: France is at present an "under-represented" country in the sense that its political leaders do not lead, are apt to underestimate the citizens and to act indecisively where the country would like them to go ahead. There is, in fact, a complete loss of contact between the political circles and the country. It can perhaps be measured by the fact that the two great parties which take the lion's share of public functions, the Socialist and the MRP, have been unable to preserve any meaningful circulation of their party dailies, both of which (Le Populaire and l'Aube) have fallen to less than 40 thousand.

Indeed one sometimes feels that the political leaders are not even eager to "take the pulse of the country". What they must take into account is far less the citizenry than the powerful agency lobbies. They seem unable to force reform upon any single fraction of the State. Nationalized industries can say them nay as no private industry dared to do in old days. The nationalized Bank of France dictates where the previously independent Bank of France complied. There is a story told of the Renault factories, which is probably mythical but which depicts a true state of affairs: the people responsible for this nationalized factory are said to have told the Minister of War that they were not interested in manufacturing tanks, as the unnationalized Renault did in the two world wars.

It is out of the question for the government to achieve any reform of the SNCF, the nationalized railways, although it has to cover, out of the budget, their deficit of 450 million dollars. They are a State within a State. No great duke in feudal days could snap his fingers at the king quite as freely as the SNCF does. An SNCF man is taken care of by a great and powerful body, to which he can turn in his every need. A deficit of 450 million dollars is a lot of money but at least the railways are a quite admirable service. Not so the nationalized aircraft industry which does not turn out more than 30 planes a month with a personnel of over 50 thousand people. But here we have a legacy of the Minister of Air in the first Fourth Republic Cabinets, Tillon, who made the aircraft factories a reserve for Communists. The Socialist unions contend that over 70 per cent of employees in the aircraft industry are Communists; this the Government says is an exaggeration -- 'tis no more than 55 per cent.

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